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CONCLUSION

"The future of its cities may well decide America's survival not merely as a society but as a civilization. As we look to the 21st century, what endeavor could possibly be more eminently worthy and necessary; more obviously logical and deserving of our national attention, expertise, and resources; or more meaningful and spiritually nourishing than that of revitalizing America's urban areas and ensuring healthy and sustainable communities--both urban and rural. A challenge so great as this cannot be met without compelling visions of what constitutes healthy and sustainable communities. We have found that such visions already exist in highly coherent and vibrant ways within many communities across the nation."

Charles Lee
United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice

Brownfields are inseparable from environmental justice and urban revitalization. When put into proper context, they reveal a nexus of issues which are indeed civilizational in dimension. Without just and livable, environmentally sound, economically sustainable, spiritually and psychologically whole urban communities, the ecological integrity of all areas in the nation--if not the world--is jeopardized. To achieve healthy and sustainable urban communities, we cannot evade the multitude of issues raised through the Brownfields debate.

A host of issues are associated with the systemic crisis in America's urban centers. In the fullest sense the urban crisis is fundamentally an ecological one, rooted in among other things the racial makeup of the structure of American cities. These issues include the untenable growth of urban sprawl, ecological importance of the urban environment, the vexing issues of race in American society, new frontiers for conduct of environmental science, reinventing government, the displacement of residents through gentrification of existing communities, building of new partnerships between, and new community-driven visions of revitalization that properly balance economic and environmental choices.

The Subcommittee believes that these are issues we as a nation can ill afford to ignore. We saw the Public Dialogues on "Urban Revitalization and Brownfields: Envisioning Healthy and Sustainable Communities" as an attempt to stimulate a new and vigorous public discourse over the environmental and economic future of America's cities. We hope that these Public Dialogues are only the beginning of many efforts by which solutions to urban revitalization/Brownfields issues can be coalesced into a coherent and compelling social vision.

The nation is locked within the throes of a set of transitions which are demographic, economic, environmental, technological, social, cultural, linguistic, generational, and indeed spiritual in nature. Urban revitalization and Brownfields offer an opportunity to shape new policy, programs, partnerships, and pilot projects which rise to the challenge of the cross-cutting issues raised in this report. The Subcommittee continues to pose these questions:

- ▶ Can this process begin to set a direction capable of crystallizing a unifying and cross-cutting vision within the federal government to serve as an anchor for the mobilization of society's resources--both public and private?
- ▶ Can the restoration of the physical environment in America's cities become the anchoring point for economic, social, cultural, and spiritual renewal and thus provide the basis for embarking upon a new and ennobling national mission?

As we confront the next century, the nation desperately needs a vision which will address issues of racial and economic polarization, economic and ecological sustainability, full mobilization of both public

and private sector resources, and the capacity to engage in meaningful public discourse. As many Public Dialogue participants reiterated, "These are indeed issues of civilizational dimensions."

In order to translate the momentum, enthusiasm, and hard work already committed to this issue into tangible and lasting benefits, EPA and other federal agencies must begin to think about a new framework which will address the issues raised through the Public Dialogues. The hallmark of that process must be informed and empowered community involvement. At the same time, the Subcommittee recommends that all agencies in the federal government consider the cross-cutting issues raised in the report and begin to shape coordinated and integrative strategies. We sincerely thank EPA for its support of the NEJAC Public Dialogues on Urban Revitalization and Brownfields. We hope that it has provided a context as well as a "road map" for moving in such a direction.

Envisioning the Next Phase of Urban Revitalization

As we look to the 21st century, what endeavor could possibly be more eminently worthy and necessary; more obviously logical and deserving of our national attention, expertise, and resources; or more meaningful and spiritually nourishing than that of revitalizing America's urban areas and ensuring healthy and sustainable communities, both urban and rural? A challenge so great as this cannot be met with compelling visions of what constitutes healthy and sustainable communities. We have found that such visions already exist in highly coherent and vibrant ways within many communities across the nation.

The questions outlined above form the guiding elements for envisioning the next phase of urban revitalization/Brownfields strategies. The NEJAC Subcommittee felt the need to identify priorities for the next two to four years from the above recommendations. The Subcommittee recognized that the Brownfields Initiative has achieved broad based support because it linked two critical areas, i.e., environmental cleanup with job creation. Over the past year, the Subcommittee has worked to stimulate dialogue on ensuring the following issue linkages:

- Environmental cleanup with job creation
- Federal facilities cleanup and restoration with urban revitalization/Brownfields
- Urban revitalization/Brownfields with transportation, regional land use, and the Department of Transportation's "Livable Communities" Initiative
- Ensuring the long-term survivability of existing communities
- Urban revitalization/Brownfields, public health, and community-based planning

We believe that a maturing discussion on the above issues will take place over the next year and provide the catalyst for a unified federal approach towards coalescing a common urban revitalization strategy across all federal agencies. Several other priorities must take place over the next two to four years:

- Establish an interagency urban revitalization/Brownfields task force, either through Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice or other appropriate mechanism;
- Convene a National Urban Revitalization/Brownfields Summit (this should be portrayed as a "national revival" for the cities);
- Support the establishment of a National Urban Revitalization/Brownfields Training Institute to develop and train in achieving healthy and sustainable communities;
- Convene a dialogue between community groups and developers/investors to achieve a common framework for decision making and working partnerships;
- Ensure support for worker training programs and establish mechanisms for better coordination;
- Establish special grant programs in areas of technical assistance to communities, small grants for community based advocacy and training, and a tribal and territorial Brownfields grant program; and

- Establish new partnerships above and beyond traditional urban revitalization/Brownfields stakeholders to include community based organizations, youth groups, faith groups, labor groups, civil rights groups, public health groups, and philanthropic organizations.

If the Brownfields issue is nothing else, it was an opportunity for community groups to engage government, developers, and other stakeholders around their vision of what healthy and sustainable communities are. The stakes cannot be greater. EPA must begin to think about a new framework which will address the issues raised through the Public Dialogues on Urban Revitalization and Brownfields. The hallmark of that process must be informed and empowered community involvement. Likewise, all agencies in the federal government should consider these cross-cutting issues and begin to shape coordinated and integrative strategies.

The NEJAC Subcommittee on Waste and Facility Siting believes that a process has been started by which environmental justice advocates and impacted communities have changed the operative definition of the term "Brownfields." This already has translated into some significant changes in the way in which EPA implements the Brownfields Initiative. We hope to engage a process which ultimately will coalesce a new type of environmental and social policy capable of meeting the challenges of revitalizing urban America and restoring ecological balance to the nation. This was our intent. Anything less would have amounted to a failure of leadership, a breaking of faith with communities, and acquiescence to business as usual.